

Society for Love, Share and Care

Maitrī Karuṇā Parishad

Bhikkhu Dhammavihari

Contents

A Change of Heart for the New Millennium	1
The State and the Fostering of Religion	4
Welfare Programs for the City's Childrens Homes	10
The New Millennium: Stepping Into It with Sanity and Wisdom	11
Ashraff Controversy / Fools Rush in Where Angels Fear to Tread	19



A Change of Heart for the New Millennium

We of the **SLSAC** or the **Society for Love, Share And Care** [Compare FLOC = For Love Of Children, in USA] at the Narada Center stand pledged as humans to offer our fellow humans Love and Care, with our own power, at down to earth level, here and now. As Buddhists, we are told that the capacity for this is within our reach, and within ourselves as well. Love and Care are primarily *mettā* and *karuṇā* of the four *Brahma Vihāras*. It is an essential requirement within our Buddhist creed.

The Metta Sutta which contains the primary injunctions on the development of this **Spirit of Universal Friendliness** or *maitrī* towards all living things prescribes it so: Let one develop an infinite spirit of friendliness towards the whole world [*mettañ ca sabba-lokasmīṃ mānasam bhāvaye aparimāṇam*]. Endowed with this quality of *mettā* or friendliness, we invariably learn to share with our fellow beings

everything that makes us happy. These include loving thoughts as well as material possessions like food and clothing.

We are further told that, on a broader basis, we should develop this attitude towards all beings [***sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā***], both great and small, seen and unseen, near or far, including both those that have already come into existence and even those that are awaiting birth like fetal bodies in a mother's womb or those that go through oviparous process of birth like the eggs of birds and reptiles [***bhūtā vā sambhavesī vā***].

The first of these, namely ***mettā***, requires that we provide for the safety of the lives of everything that lives. We should ourselves neither kill [***pāṇaṃ na hane***], nor get others to kill for our sake [***na ca ghātayeyya***]. Nor should we endorse or approve killing by others [***na c'ānujaññā hanatāṃ paresaṃ***.] All at Suttanipāta v. 394 in the Dhammika Sutta. Buddhists should strive towards getting to this target. This is true development of ***mettā***, the quality of loving others as much as we like to be loved [***attānam upamaṃ katvā***].

While Sri Lanka at the moment needs a good deal of this spirit of universal friendliness or ***mettā*** towards all living things, we also feel the urgent need for care and concern for those in need, for those under stress and strain. There are many in need of a gesture of kindness and compassion from those around them. This is ***karuṇā***.

The human community anywhere is vast and complex. Over the years, the children's homes in metropolitan Colombo and the neighbourhood have engaged our attention. I've got very near to some of them and their inmates. I know that food and clothing are adequately provided for the children. They are even sent to schools, to prepare them for O Level and A Level Examinations. Having studied the bio-data of most children and having spoken to them in trust and confidence, I have also discovered many areas of gross neglect in their lives. One does not seem to get even to the periphery of their emotional life. That they have latent

skills, orphaned though they may be, is not even reckoned with. If these children who are in this present plight are to be elevated to full stature of human growth, we have to definitely pay them a little more attention.

It is to cater for and look after these two areas that we have decided to form this small society which we shall name **LOVE, SHARE and CARE**. We shall always go to the children, wherever they be, offer them friendship, love and care and offer to make good what they have lost, lack or are direly in need.

1. Parental love and love from the family which they have lost under very tragic circumstances, we shall try to retrieve by working out a scheme of *pro tem* foster parents as each new situation necessitates and facilitates. We should find in metropolitan Colombo enough philanthropic and generous senior citizens who would gladly step into the role of *in loco parentis*.
2. Besides the mere schooling for O Levels and A Levels, there is also an intellectual growth of these children which must be tied up with their emotional life. There is a wealth of knowledge in the world which lies outside the school curriculum which should be utilized to enrich their emotional life. We plan to visit these children's homes on a regular basis to show them high class educational films on natural history, science and world events. On these occasions, we shall provide for these children to meet some senior citizens as well as educated and responsible youth, both men and women from the city. This will contribute to the enhancement of the moral tone of these children.
3. We also pay special attention to their emotional need of wanting to be loved and taken care of. From time to time, we have been inviting selected numbers of children from these homes to social get-togethers at the Narada Center. At these gatherings, we commence our activities with *Ratanattaya Vandana*, providing the children a religious or spiritual aura. This is generally followed by a brief introduction to the social philosophy of Buddhism, fitting these children correctly to our social community. Our patrons have always

generously cooperated with us in providing adequate food and drinks on these occasions. We have even been able to offer small gifts to the children who attend these get-togethers. Children's Homes have cooperated with us beautifully in making these parties quite a success. Often, the matrons themselves have accompanied the children on these visits.

4. We are equally conscious of the need to develop the creative skills of these children. It is already been done in most of the homes. Their skills at handycrafts like sewing, knitting, pottery, wood carving etc. have to be developed and stimulated. This area of assistance has to be undertaken in cooperation with the boards of management of the homes themselves.
5. Many more areas of useful activity can indeed be brought in with magnanimous thinking and a deep sense of philanthropy.



The State and the Fostering of Religion

Bhikkhu Professor Dhammavihari

The concept in itself looks a highly commendable one. Our own Constitution is said to and believed to contain a clause pertaining to this. Undoubtedly it came into existence, apparently with a concern for the ethics of good government, at a time when the colonial rulers took over the administration of our island country. We believe it was with a serious concern. Let us not distrust its seriousness. But let us not forget that it has been the rule in history that invaders overrun a country anywhere, not only politically, but also religiously and culturally. At the point of the sword and the gun, new religions and alien life styles have been imposed on the conquered, almost everywhere in the world.

At the time when Sri Lanka fell into the hands of the last colonial rulers, it was reckoned in many quarters to be the land of the Buddha. To say the least, it was predominantly a Buddhist land. Even as far back as the 5th century A.D. the Chinese Buddhist monk who visited Sri Lanka knew it as Sinhala - the Land of the Lion People or Shih tse Kuo [as written in Chinese characters]. There is not much need for any body to ask for or search for demographic details. Within a period of nearly two thousand years, Sri Lanka had gradually moved into being a land of peace and prosperity, making it widely known to be the granary of the east. This was under the benign teachings of the Buddha who had taught to the world that wonderful art of live and let live, based on the foundations of *metta* or *maitri*.

For the peaceful and successful continuance of their rule in the newly conquered territory, the colonial powers had to guarantee to the somewhat sagacious native leadership of the country in those balmy days that they meant no violence to the cultural heritage of this country. Apparently they had heard and known enough of it by then. But certainly they did not come here to save and preserve it for us. It was by no means their avowed mission. But we at times, were duped into believing it to be so.

The legal phrasing in the convention to give prominence to Buddhism and protect it could not have been worded any more scantily. In whose midst was Buddhism going to be made prominent? One would ask. Was there any time or space allocation implied? As for protection, from whom was it to be protected? Do we guess correctly if we said that it was perhaps to enlarge the image of an imagined enemy and thereby glorify the image of the protector. That is why the protesters of today continue to keep asking, and legitimately so, our legal experts as to what these promises of prominence and protection meant. And what they mean to our present custodians. Those words could not be any more vague and evasive.

Even today, Buddhism is the overwhelmingly majority religion. Everybody

sees and knows the strategies, at least within the country towards the reversal of that position. Let not the rulers of the land or the ruled put the telescope on to the blind eye on this issue. History as a subject, even though bitter in taste at times, is not a stupid one. It is worth both being taught and studied, with a fair degree of honesty of course, in the schools and the universities, for the lessons it provides. Here we call upon the historians, sociologists and professors of law to step in to put the map right. They need to examine and study the deliberate distortions and exaggerations which writers of history smuggle in from time to time. Today, revisionists and those who rewrite history mischievously cause great damage. We also need to expose and lay bare the evasive legal phrasings which are meant to safeguard at the same time both the prosecution and the defense.

We are reaching a stage in Sri Lankan history today when this question cannot be dodged by anyone, any more. The state which stands to safeguard the interests of the people whom it is pledged to govern has to look into these threats which overhang both majority and minority communities, be it religion or culture. What poor consolation would it be to find the state patronizing and funding funerals and cremations of individuals when the larger scale deaths of institutions and communities is steadily taking place? It is time now to step in to face these situations fair and square.

Many of our neighboring countries are alive to problems of this nature. Their sociologists detect these well in time and warn their governments about averting such disasters. Their legal brains awaken well before such calamitous situations take place and introduce new and adequate updated legislation to deal with and arrest such insidious moves. Such timely action may at times look harsh, and even be labeled so. But governments have to take them up with adequate seriousness.

In terms of Buddhist thinking, we feel that the role of religion should primarily be to make life in the land, life both of man and animal, secure and free from the disaster and destruction which humans are known to bring upon themselves and

those around. This sense of insecurity as well as fear and dread into which man puts the society around him is referred to in Buddhism as *bhayani* and is classified as being fivefold: *panca-bhayani*. They result from man's own hostile attitude to the world: *verāni* or *panca-verani*. This is basically derived from the Buddhist theory of *panca-sila*. They come about in the breach of these regulatory precepts.

It begins with man's disrespect or scant respect for life, of both man and animal. One's own self being put above all else, humans at times turn stupid enough to dismiss and destroy all others that even appear to stand in one's way, in private life and public life which may range from social, religious to political arenas. At times, this is defended on grounds of self-defense. Individuals as well as larger groups are seen doing this at world level today. But its legitimacy is being contested all the time. Trials, sooner or later, as of war criminals of World War II at Nuremberg, and of more recent ones being attempted in Bosnia and Albania etc. are testimony of this.

Man has also inherited from some misdirected philosophies some-where that the world around him is created for his gleeful exploitation. Ideas of unreplaceable resources of the world and of ecological balancing had lamentably not dawned on him. Until recently, kill and eat to live had become an acceptable norm. That was good enough during days of primitive thinking. But certainly not today. The wind is now blowing in a different direction. People, above and below, in this part of the world need to know of these tremendous world movements. Post-World War II thinking savors of this new attitude to the world we live in. It is one of live and let live, a new attitude of man towards man as well as bird and beast, including even the inanimate in the entire eco-system.

Ashamedly turning away from this heartless attitude of man, wave after wave of new thinking has emerged, at least in the English speaking world as far as we know, during the last three or four decades. Books like Frances M. Lappe's *Diet for a Small Planet*, Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* and *Save the Animals*,

Jeremy Riffkin's *Beyond Beef* and the Breakdown of the Cattle Culture and Victoria Moran's *Compassion, the Ultimate Ethic* reveal both the folly of rearing and killing of animals for food and man's own misdirected adventure of mishandling nature, thereby wiping out man's chances of survival on this planet. Particularly a book like *Biophilia Hypothesis* would enlighten us on this issue that no prayers would save us from extinction on this planet at the rate man shows disregard for life.

A state which is statutorily pledged to uphold the culture of Buddhism [not merely its infra-structure], and we have no doubt whatsoever that this is what the convention provides for, cannot possibly turn a deaf ear or a blind eye to this primary aspect of Buddhist culture which the world today is very much in need of. Funding Buddhist monasteries and competing to provide them with more than what they need completely misses the mark. In the name of Buddhism, protection of life of man and animal in the land and guaranteeing them security should be the main theme and the priority of the state policy.

This is what the benevolent king Cakkavatti of early Buddhist tradition stood up for. Besides, the saner and more civilized world is now subscribing towards it. King Devanampiya Tissa in whose reign Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka, and who was shamelessly caught in the act of being on the deer hunt for his personal pleasure on that occasion, soon paved the way for a ban of animal slaughter in the land with the policy of *ma ghata* or 'prohibition of killing in specified areas.' Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country. Sri Lanka cannot sell meat to the world. It violates the spirit of Buddhism. Therefore it would amount to a breach of the convention,

This respect for life we sponsor is a priority and the crying need of the day in view of the destruction of life one witnesses all around in the land. Take note of the gruesome killings in the war-torn areas as well as abominable murders of men, women and children of all ages in the village and the town. This is encroaching on animal life too, without any compunction. Whether it be the

wanton killing of the elephant with its thinning out population [to safeguard the village chenas] or the poaching in the sanctuaries for leopard and deer skins, or the massive scale killing for human consumption, it is killing all the same. Buddhism requires serious action on the part of rulers in this direction. Development policy of any government in this country has necessarily to contain this too, with or without international blessings.

By the convention we are talking about, every government in this country is pledged to uphold Buddhism as the religion of the land. It requires no extra-sensory perception to realize that this implies two major issues. First, it requires that the survival of Buddhism must be safeguarded by the state in the face of diverse threats that are being leveled against it at the moment, both from within the land and from without. Agencies who are known to be involved in these activities endeavor to conceal their identities by engaging in makeshift couplings on international basis, the east with the west. Whether one calls them well-paid sales agents or hired assassins, that seems to be the naked truth. Many countries around us have built safeguards against such activities, including jail sentences and even more, for the miscreants. Where are we? Doubtlessly, a long way more to go.

Secondly, it is for the State to honestly recognize the worth of the religion to which the Britishers undertook in their Convention to give its rightful place. The State must undertake to propagate its cultural content both within the country for the benefit of its inhabitants and to make it widely known to the rest of the world as having a worthy identity of its own. Sri Lanka must surely move in consonance with its cultural heritage. There is nothing in it which the civilized world of today would refuse to accept. These primarily consist of its respect for all forms of life of both man and animal, respect for honesty and integrity in all dealings both individual and social, respect for sexes at all levels both in the home and society, and respect for sanity and soundness of judgment by rejecting drugs and intoxicants. Let us repeat that all these are contained within the universal ethic of

panca-sila.

Buddhism in the world today, in both forms known until recently as Mahayana and Vajrayana, is actively engaged in propagating what they now call the teachings of Shakyamuni. Shakyamuni is the historical Buddha Gotama who gave to the world his most humanitarian teaching well over twenty-five centuries ago. They are now obliterating all sectarian differences and are willing to work from a single platform. The impact of this new cultural move of Buddhism, we know for certain, is now globally felt. It is time for Sri Lanka to rise from its slumber. Do not miss this chance of playing even the second fiddle.

The year 2000 is now round the corner. Sri Lanka expects both of the State and its people new thinking and new lines of action on the dawn of the new millennium. This is the writing on the wall.

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Welfare Programs for the City's Childrens Homes

A scheme by the SLAC [Society for Love And Care] to assist them
[SLAC as an ancillary of the IBRIC works closely with DAYA - Dhamma And Young Adults]

We go on the assumption that Childrens Homes run by the State and Private Organizations in the City of Colombo are satisfactorily managed, both with regard to their provision of food and clothing, educational facilities and health care. We look upon the children in these homes as a vital component of our national asset. We would therefore make an all out endeavour to get the words **orphans** and **orphanages** associated with these institutions which carry a painful stigma with

them completely taken off the picture. They are just our children, a national asset.

Children in these places should, at no stage, be made to feel or even sense that they are charity-promoting objects of pity. They are indeed only a reflection of the social reality in our country of haves and have-nots. The circumstances under which these have taken place like wars, communal riots, and broken homes may vary from time to time and place to place. We appreciate that children in these homes suffer for want of both material and emotional needs. A fair amount of them are also physically and mentally handicapped. These latter need special care and management. Compared with many other countries in the world, our situation is considerably comforting.

Therefore we choose to step in, to assist in whatever way possible, to this middle group of emotional needs of these children. Our experience with them in the past has shown us that they seriously feel a lack of acceptance and recognition as members of our social fabric, with an equal right as any other. Many of them have educational capabilities comparable to home-dweller children. They also have multi-faceted skills which are to be delicately sorted out and developed. We are also equally aware that in the category of home-dwellers in the city we would discover many children who suffer from emotional mismanagement even in the hands of their parents. We wish to reach out towards all these in due course.



The New Millennium: Stepping Into It with Sanity and Wisdom

Bhikkhu Professor Dhammavihari

Time is a stream of continuous flow and one can undeniably step into at any point. Any divisions of it in terms of centuries or millennia are only appropriations by individuals or groups according to their own vested interests or according to historical, mythical and legendary associations. But these time slots can also be used by sensible people as convenient starting points for any new meaningful ventures or for the reformation of old structures and patterns.

Starting with the zero of the Christian era or the *Anno Domini*, we are now getting ready to claim with pride that we have lived through two millennia. Some come out with prophecies as to what would happen to the world at the end of the millennium, its destruction or disastrous changes within it. Yet others announce ambitious claims as to what each should achieve as world conquests in the name of their religion or ethnicity. Let us be a bit more modest about these. Let there be a little more dignified restraint. Let a bit more sanity come in, even in the name of religion or unseen powers above and beyond us.

Human civilization of a fairly high level, at least in Asia, has been through more than two millennia prior to that. But as for rapid human progress in the not too distant past, there definitely is legitimacy to these claims in terms of many areas of life activity. In terms of science and technology which are in the forefront of our lives today, we have moved much further than the post-Galilean achievements. In the field of biological and neuro-sciences, we have made incredible advances. These can and should lead to the elevation and exaltation of human life from the stage of *Pithecanthropus Erectus* to that of an adequately developed modern man. An elevation that should serve man, well before others elsewhere, in regions unknown and only speculated and believed in.

But what actually has happened in the world, both in the east and the west, points to the contrary. While medical sciences in their researches have considerably contributed to the prevention and effective cure of many death dealing diseases and thereby contributed to the enhancement of life expectancy

of humans, many scientific discoveries of today lead, directly or indirectly to the destruction and devastation of life on earth, both of man and animal. At the highest levels, genetic engineering, bio-technology and commercially motivated pharmaceutical productions are such questionable areas.

Think next of the industrial Olympics of the arrogantly so-called developed nations, everywhere in the east and the west. Gold, silver and bronze awards in these fields, where do they lead humanity. Massive arrays of researchers and scientists who are mobilized and hired to carry out the profit motivated ambitious plans of business tycoons can in no way be said to contribute to human happiness. It is too well known now that unimaginable profits are, in most deceptive and secretive manner, siphoned into the pockets of a few misanthropists. Governments of even the biggest democracies in the world, we know, appear helpless in tackling them. They tackle the governments everywhere.

Another great disaster facing the entire world, particularly in the second half of this century, is the arms race or the competitive production of weapons of war. This dirty game, more for offense than defense, is indulged in even by the smaller nations who wish to become great ones thereby. That even after the second world war, nuclear weapons were secretly deployed by super powers in their own defense in many parts the world, even in countries like Japan who dreaded them, is now well known everywhere. In the name of God, in whose defense are they being proliferated, political ideologies, genocidal ethnicity or religious fanaticism?

But development wise, man of today is lost in the wilderness of time. He knows not whence he came, whither he goes. In this twentieth century, the last one of the second millennium, humanity has too many black marks in its name. Two world wars have charred a greater part of it. Many more regional wars are now setting it ablaze everywhere. Think of Bosnia, East Timor and even Sri Lanka. World organizations like the United Nations have not been able to

stabilize these outbursts or clear human groups of their blood stains. We categorically say that the machinery of Fundamental Human Rights has miserably failed. The U.N. is often seen to be manipulated by super powers and cannot be looked upon as non-partisan. Against the villainous behaviour of political ideologies, diabolic religious fanaticism and genocidal arrogance of ethnicity, nothing short of total annihilation seems to be the inevitable result.

Let us now turn to the moral life of man, i.e. the social behaviour of our men, women and children. Call this phase of life of humans religious or spiritual or whatever you like. Do men, women and children of the world know in what relationship they should stand to one another. We unhesitatingly say that reckless new thinking in the world, sometimes backed even by religious factions, has shattered the entire network of social relationships. Like power seeking political parties everywhere, even religious groups seem to endeavour to precariously hang on to these newfangled patterns of new social thinking in the interest of their own survival.

Religious groups in the world today strive to win large scale support from the lay community by siding with groups like feminist activists who are creating a bit of a stir and sensation. Considerations like premarital sex, and along with it unmarried mothers and fatherless or single-parent homes and abortion seem to compel religious groups to take up revisionist positions or break away from main stream religious thinking. In the west, there are factions of the main stream church who support, under the name of contraception, the destruction of the fertilized human egg which is on its way to get implanted in the mother's womb. This they do with an injection to the pregnant mother. The main stream orthodox church condemns this in no uncertain terms. These now lead to severe crack-ups even in the orthodox institutions.

This is what the turn of the millennium witnesses in the field of religion today. These attempts at convenient modernization and compromising moves, deviating from the orthodoxy, merely for the sake of building up party strength or increase

of group numbers, are signs of dissolution and disintegration. It is time now for the Buddhists to become aware of these world trends and look out for such disastrous alien thinking within our own groups. We should guard against such action creeping into our own circles. Our groups need consolidation. Our primary need is self-awareness with regard to our own self-identity.

The turn of the century or the dawn of the new millennium, in itself, has no sanctity to us. But everyone of us can use it as a signal for a change of heart and for the commencement of a brave new line of thinking. It can be used to usher in many new changes in every walk of life which are healthy and vibrant. The Buddhists have had values laid down for them for more than twenty-five centuries. Values for the regulation of the life style of men, women and children in their day to day life. Group relationships are equally well regulated, with interpersonal relationships basically in mind. Through time and space these values spread to almost every part of Asia, from the Japanese archipelago in the east to the Caspian sea in west. By the 2nd century A.D., the Buddhists of Afghanistan, the greater part of which along with Iran and Iraq was Buddhist by then, have left for posterity Buddhist sermons in stone by way of superb Hellenistic Greek stone carvings, indicating the evils of drinking. These can be seen even today, in places like the Muse Guimet in Paris.

Let us begin with the personal life of the Buddhist. The first grim reminder to him is that he has a life which is to be lived here, to the best of his ability, within a framework of goodness which is unmistakably defined in Buddhist teachings. It is a goodness which is calculated to bring about the maximum justifiable happiness to the person who lives accordingly. This is emphatically pronounced in Pali as *Dhammo suciṇṇo sukhamāvahāti* = Dhamma well lived bestows happiness. It is stated with equal emphasis that humans, living in terms of these Buddhist specifications, reduce and eliminate the stress and strain to which society is put by the wild and unruly behaviour of its men and women, not to speak of the children. This is referred to as *pañcabhayāni vūpasantani*. At this stage, we call

upon all Buddhists to awaken to the reality of personal responsibility and accountability on which a very high premium is set in Buddhism.

This reciprocal awareness of the role of decent living in society, with love [*mettā*] and consideration [*karuṇā*] for others, is the primary function of *pañcasīla* in Buddhism. One of our main thrusts as Buddhists, on the advent of the new millennium, has to be to clarify the role of *pañcasīla* and plead with all humans, Buddhists as well as non-Buddhists to endeavour to adhere to these precepts of good living which decent society unhesitatingly requires. To be honest, we know that many non-Buddhists all over the world do so to a greater or lesser degree.

Within it are brought respect for all forms of life, a concept which is gaining worldwide recognition today on account of the new awareness about ecosystems and biodiversity. Life in the world to us is a joint operation, inter-related. It has to be one of respectful co-existence. Nothing is created in the world to be destroyed and consumed by another. Such concepts, in the world today, are getting into the category of old world myths. It is neither religion nor philosophy. This consideration is essentially based on the awareness that all living things love to continue to live [*jīvitukāmā*]. They all dread being destroyed [*amaritukāmā*]. A lover of life, and everyone of us being one, shall not be a destroyer of life. *Tasmā na himse param attakāmo* = He who loves himself shall cause no injury to another.

It is this same principle and same consideration which requires people not to dispossess others of what legitimately belongs to them. This is what forbids theft [*adinnādānā veramaṇī*]. Have people not a heart about this? When one robs, one robs others of their source of joy and pleasure. What one needs for oneself, one must acquire through just means. Overscoring the hue and cry about 'haves and have-nots' does not justify theft and robbery in society.

The Buddhist requirement of propriety in respect of sexual relationships [*kāmesu micchācārāveramaṇī*], touching on areas of pre-marital sex, conjugal

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fideliity, and adulterous behaviour savors on the one hand of this respect for what legitimately belongs to others. The other, of course, is the restraint in the gratification of the senses. In Buddhism, sexual love, marriage and reproduction seem to be closely interconnected. Thus homosexuality is to be viewed in this light. This also glorifies the position of woman in Buddhism.

The fourth precept of the *pañcasīla* deals with honesty which is a vital ingredient in all social transactions. Breach of trust at domestic, public, political and all levels stands in the way of social continuity. It is viewed as a despicably low weakness and Buddhism declares that in its presence no act of meanness is impossible [*natthi pāpaṃ akāriyaṃ*]. In resorting to dishonesty, the end cannot be held to justify the means.

Finally we are reminded of the need for humans to safeguard sanity of judgement by keeping away from drugs and alcohol [*Kin nu kho bhikkhave taṃ pātabbaṃ yaṃ pivitā visaññī assa* = Should anyone ever take anything which puts one out of one's senses?]. Many people take up the mistaken position that drinking is a social requirement. It takes them quite some time before they realize that drinking also turns out to be socially menacing, for the individual, family and society.. We have already indicated at the very outset that Afghanistan Buddhists, nearly two thousand years ago, fully appreciated the worth of this teaching. They transmitted it to posterity through their famous stone carving entitled **Family Drinking Scene**, now preserved in the Muse Guimet in Paris.

What we have attempted today is to portray to our Sri Lankan readers the current world situation with regard to different vital areas of decay in social relations, moral standards and religious values. At world level, honest endeavours are being made both by religious institutions and powerful groups of social scientists to arrest these. As we indicated above, the dawn of a new millennium is an opportune moment for people with a distinct identity and a world record of powerful philanthropic thinking to reassert their basic teachings. This message is to the Sri Lankans, and to the Buddhists in particular, who have more

than twenty-three centuries of Buddhist culture to their credit.

Commencing with the respect for life, life of man and bird and beast [which is enjoined in the first precept of the *pañcasīla*], let us call upon all Sri Lankans, without any discrimination of religion, caste or creed to observe from the commencement of the new millennium **one vegetarian day every week**. Let us do this with a firm resolve to reduce violence in the land. 1.1.2000 is a Saturday. Can not every family in Sri Lanka keep the Saturday of the week a vegetarian day? It must be planned to be a joint family activity, when the children of the household look up to their father joining the mother **to plan a day of vegetarian cooking for the family**.

This immediately makes the family energetic and enterprising. Something good for the new millennium! A new approach, with a great deal of imagination, has to be undertaken. An attractive and an equally delightful menu has to be prepared, one or two, not forgetting the dinner. Recipes have to be sought, cooking material have to be found, form your own garden, *pola* or even the Super Market, which in the 1990 's is your more popular resort.

Once you start on this line of thinking, you turn out to be wonderfully resourceful. You would want your own garden to produce at least half the vegetables you need, starting with your green chillies and *karapinca*, your curry leaves. Your whole household, particularly the children, even with their tuition classes and home work, would clamor to join in. What a loving and cooperative family unit as a result of planning for a vegetarian day?

If you need some planting material, I am sure we can arrange it for you. I can give you some vegetable seeds out of what I have brought for you from United States. But first comes first serve. In many states there like Dallas and Carolina, I found our Sri Lankans growing a large variety of vegetables plentifully, including *Patola, Karavila, Vatakolu, Malu Miris, Wattakka Takkāli* etc, etc. This line of action at domestic level would invariably open new avenues for peace and

prosperity in the land.

One more request I would like to make. That is in the direction of personal self discipline. We humans need to assess from time to time as to how much inner strength we possess. Buddhism, together with some of the other Indian religions, had recognized this need very early and recommended ways to achieve it. It is the exercise of *upavāsa* or fasting. It would do well for all adults, male and female, to undertake a fast at least once a week. Forego at least one dinner a week. We would thereby learn to develop an inner strength to withstand challenges from the world outside. These are only some suggestions for cooperative thinking and fruitful action in the new millennium. Let us try. I wish you success.



Ashraff Controversy / Fools Rush in Where Angels Fear to Tread

- a concluding note from Bhikkhu Dhammavihari

This is with reference to Poet Ashraff and his self-admitted ignorant references to the Buddha in his poetic adventures. Sponsoring the cause of the 'minority Tamils', he is indeed more romantic than poetic. It is not our endeavour here to call every poet and the neo-scientific philosophers of Sri Lanka fools. But when they venture too far into the field, without knowing even the ABC of the subject they are dealing with, we are at a loss to find a more apt word than that.

In faiths other than Buddhism, when unguarded and unrestrained statements about religions or religious leaders are made, in prose or verse, a team of head-hunters are set on the trail, to get them live or dead. The culture of Buddhism, in

its twenty-five century old history has reached a point higher and more dignified than that.

In a world plagued with the supremacist tendency where every ethnic group, religious denomination or political ideology wishes to believe that they alone and nobody else has anything better to offer, conscious or unconscious under-rating of the other is nothing unusual. Most people even forget how senior or junior they are chronologically in the history of the world. The three major religions of the world, it must be remembered, are at least five hundred years apart, one from the other, starting from 500 B.C. and ending in 500 A.D.

When they start talking arrogantly about one another, as for instance when one religious group in America decries the Hindus, saying that they have no right to celebrate Deevali as the festival of light, as they are in perpetual darkness, worshipping gods in animal form, it is not much worse than the pot calling the kettle black. This kind of supremacist buffoonery of any group, religious, ethnic or political, referring to the other as inferior, must definitely stop and we must, at least in this country, put an end to all attempts at conversion and proselytization from one religious group to another. It befits not our cultural milieu. It is best tried where it is most needed.

Anybody asking the Buddhists about the religious justifiability of the present war, in our opinion, is deliberately dodging the point at issue. Why not ask as to who, as invader or marauder, brings the war to the door step of the seventy percent Buddhists of this country who are unarmed? A government which has any sense of what their obligations are to the people whom they govern, has to take up the challenge and play the role of the defender.

Those who know Sri Lankan history, or cares to know it without prejudice, would realize that it was in a situation not very dissimilar to this, the threat coming from the same source, that both Dutthagamani and his father Kavantissa stepped in to prevent a larger scale massacre and a cultural inundation in this

country. No government need get cold feet on this, on the correctness of policy to follow. A third party, watching from near or far, who would invariably benefit from the on going struggle, certainly cannot claim to sit in judgement.

Poet Ashraff has now tendered a public apology for his blunders on Buddhology and his rough handling of a delicate issue. If a mistake is honestly admitted as a mistake, with a guarantee of no further repetition, let us calmly say ' O Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

